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AF/S FOR S. HILL
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVILLE

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SUBJECT: PARLIAMENTARY WOMEN'S CAUCUS GAINING GREATER VOICE

Summary

¶1. (U) Zimbabwe,s Parliamentary Women,s Caucus on October 6 met with civil society and donor representatives to call for greater cooperation across party lines on gender issues. Participants at the meeting said that the Caucus, which is lead by ZANU-PF MP Flora Bhuka and MDC MP Thokozani Khupe, was able to set aside political disagreements on issues of common concern, such as passage of the Domestic Violence Bill. The Caucus criticized opponents of the Bill and on October 9 marched to the opposition,s headquarters to protest sexist statements by MDC MP Timothy Mubawu. End Summary.

Female Legislators Call For Greater Unity

¶2. (U) POL/ECON FSN attended a meeting of the Parliamentary Women,s Caucus on October 6. Caucus Chairperson Flora Bhuka, ZANU-PF Minister for Land Reform, commended the body for its work on issues of concern to women. Echoing Bhuka,s comment, ZANU-PF Minister of Women,s Affairs Oppah Muchinguri stated that the members of the Caucus from both ZANU-PF and the MDC have been able to put their political differences aside and collaborate over a common agenda involving women,s issues. Caucus deputy chairwoman MP Thokozani Khupe, who is the anti-Senate MDC Vice President, also participated in the meeting, demonstrating the by-partisan nature of the body. (Note: Despite the inter-party good-will, Muchinguri cautioned that she works for ZANU-PF and needs to respect the party,s policies End Note.)

¶3. (U) Caucus leaders made an appeal to civil society and

donor attendees to assist legislators pushing for gender equality. Bhuka said that training of female elected officials should be a top priority and asked the NGOs to work with women contesting the October 28 rural council elections to help them understand and appreciate their roles as leaders in society. She said that out of the 1,200 candidates, 370 were women. Bhuka emphasized that the Caucus would like to see women represented in greater numbers in decision making bodies.

Attacking Critics of Domestic Violence Bill

¶4. (U) The Women,s Caucus called on its members to rally for the passage of the Domestic Violence Bill, which would criminalize abuse committed within a household. The draft law is currently in the House of Assembly, after having been revised slightly following a public hearing last month.

¶5. (U) The Caucus members expressed outrage at the statements of anti-Senate MDC MP Timothy Mubawu during a Parliamentary debate on the Bill October 5 when he said &the bill was diabolic and that it is &against God,s principles that women and men should be equal.8 Inspired by the Caucus meeting, on October 10 approximately 60 women from the Women,s Coalition) a grouping of women,s rights NGOs - marched to Parliament and the anti-Senate MDC headquarters, carrying placards denouncing domestic violence and Mubawu. Opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai addressed the marchers at his office to acknowledge their concerns, but he urged them to demonstrate against all forms of violence in Zimbabwean society, not domestic violence alone.

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Comment

¶6. (SBU) Domestic violence against women is pervasive in Zimbabwe due to both shortcomings in the existing law and a general unwillingness to prosecute by police and courts, which generally see this type of abuse as a social norm, rather than a crime. The Domestic Violence Bill would expand the rights of women and make a strong symbolic statement on the need for better enforcement. It was encouraging, if rare, to see members of parliament from both sides of the aisle put aside their differences and come together on an important issue such as domestic violence. This was likely the result of the strong constituencies that exist within ZANU-PF and both opposition factions on women,s issues. Unfortunately, the odious Mubawu and others who think like him are also to be found throughout the political system, though in ever fewer numbers.
SCHULTZ